OF THE

Wiſdom and Goodneſs OF PROVIDENCE.

TWO

SERMONS

Preached before the

QUEEN,

AT

WHITE-HALL,

On AUGUST { 17 / 24 } MDCXC.

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OF THE Wiſdom and Goodneſs OF PROVIDENCE. TWO SERMONS BEFORE THE QUEEN.

Proverbs iii. 6.

In all thy ways, acknowledg him.

IT would not be eaſie for men with little Temptation to be drawn into great Sins, if they were fully perſwaded that God was preſent, did behold the Affronts they were putting upon him, and would call them to a

ſtrict account for them: Neither would good Chriſtians be ſo affrighted with the remote appearances of danger, and ſink ſo quickly under Affliction, had they a firm belief that God was ever nigh them, and ready to deliver and ſupport them.

Thoſe Holy Perſons who accuſtom themſelves to conceive God always preſent, as they dread doing the leaſt evil, or neglecting any part of their Duty, ſo the moſt terrible and cruel Attempts of the Wicked, cannot make them withdraw their Dependance upon the Divine Providence, or renounce the hopes they have in God's Mercy: So that the Boldneſs and Security which does appear in bad men, and the unreaſonable and groundleſs Fears to be found in ſome Chriſtians, do both chiefly proceed from their want of a hearty Perſuaſion of the Omnipreſence of God, who obſerves their whole Behaviour, and will certainly puniſh Sinners, but protect and preſerve his Servants.

Nothing then will more ſuppreſs Wickedneſs, and diſmay and terrifie Sinners, than frequent Meditations upon the Divine Preſence; and nothing would ſo uphold our Spirits in all Conditions, as to let it be our daily

daily Practice to think of the unerring Providence of God, which diſpoſes all Affairs and Events by wiſe Rules, and ſends Good or Evil to men according as the circumſtances of their preſent ſtate do require, and ever with a deſign to make them the better thereby.

If therefore men did believe that God governed the World, and ordered all the Affairs thereof, they could not aſcribe the iſſue of things to their own Power, and look upon the Proſperity of their Condition to be the effect alone of their own Wiſdom and good Management. Neither would they think that thoſe Pains, Loſſes, and Calamities came by Accident and Chance, which God ſent on purpoſe, either to try their love, or to reform their Manners, or to puniſh their Sins for an example to others.

It muſt much abate the Bitterneſs of Afflictions and Loſſes, to be convinced, that they who are humbled under them, who bear them meekly, and dutifully do ſubmit to the Pleaſure of God, will thereby greatly improve the Graces and Virtues of their Soul, and ſhall receive ſome extraordinary Bleſſing from the hand of God, the reliſh of which

will be much heighten'd by their paſt ſufferings. So as in due time they ſhall ſee good reaſon for that Calamity, which was at preſent ſo grievous unto them.

They then who think God does not concern himſelf in the Affairs of the World, nor regard the Lives of Men, can never truly Reverence him, nor Worſhip him ſincerely; but whereever there is a vigorous belief of Providence, it will always be followed with the Love and Fear of God.

That therefore in the courſe of our Lives, we may ſet the Lord before us, and direct our Deſigns to his Glory, that we may uſe the Goods he gives us, diſcreetly and temperately; and when he afflicts us, that we may be patient, quiet, and humble, and without Murmur or Complaint, make an entire Reſignation of our ſelves, and of all we have, unto his Righteous Will, that we may be grateful for his Mercies, and *in all our ways acknowledg him*, and think of him; I ſhall take leave to propoſe theſe following things to your Conſideration.

(1.) That nothing can come to us through the whole Courſe of this Life, without the Order or Permiſſion of Providence.

(2.) That

(2.) That we ſhould ſometimes receive Evil from the Hand of God as well as good, is very agreeable to his Wiſdom.

(3.) That if we equally conſider things, God's Goodneſs and Mercy will appear in our greateſt Sufferings.

(1.) That nothing can come to us through the whole courſe of this Life, without the order, or at leaſt, the permiſſion of Providence. When God had made the World, he did not leave it to ſhift for it ſelf, without any farther regard of it: But his Power does as truly appear in the Preſervation and Government thereof, as it did in its Creation. What he thought fit for his Power to give Being and Life to, he thinks becoming his Goodneſs and Wiſdom to uphold and preſerve, as judging all the works of his Hands, worthy of his Providence and Care.

So that there is not any thing which does come by inflexible Fate, or depend upon the uncertainties of Fortune: But God does look down upon every work, he beholds the carriage of all his Creatures; he perpetually ſupports the order among things, and directs the whole courſe of Nature in ſuch juſt manner, as ſhall ſerve for the greateſt good and happineſs

pineſs of the Creation, and moſt illuſtrate his own Glory.

This all follows plainly from the Nature of God, which conſiſts in infinite Perfection; but the denying of Providence, or the ſuppoſal that matters go in the World, either by Fate, or Chance, is moſt repugnant to the Bleſſed Nature of God, and does contradict almoſt every one of his Attributes and Perfections; who could not be Almighty if there was any Power independent upon his; who would not be infinitely Wiſe if he Govern'd the vaſt productions of his Power by no Laws; whoſe Goodneſs would not be boundleſs, if he had no care of thoſe who Loved Him; if he did not reſcue thoſe who ſuffer'd for his ſake; whoſe Knowledg would not be immenſe if he did not ſee all that was acted in the World, if he was not an obſerver of the words and deeds, but alſo privy to the very thoughts of his Creatures.

† Without all things done under the Sun lay open to the Divine view, why ſhould the Good hope in God's Mercy, or the Wicked tremble at his Juſtice? If he did not

† *Quod ni ita ſit, quid veneramur, quid precamur Deos? Cur ſacris Pontifices, cur Auſpiciis Augures præſunt? Quid optamus a Diis immortalibus? Quid vovemus? At etiam liber eſt Epicuri de ſanctitate. Ludimur ab homine non tam faceto, quam ad ſcribendi Licentiam Libero. Quæ enim poteſt eſſe ſanctitas, ſi Dii humana non Curant?* Cic. de nat. Deor Lib. 1.

not at all mind the ways of men, they would have no motives to Love him, nor reaſon to Fear they ſhould fall under his diſpleaſure, by acting the moſt horrid Impieties.

Prayer is the primary Duty of Chriſtians, the great Inſtrument by which they obtain a ſupply of all neceſſaries, Bodily and Spiritual, and the chief ſupport of their Minds in Trouble; whereby they compoſe themſelves to endure the ſharpeſt Sufferings, and become conquerors of their ſtrongeſt Temptations: But if God has no Knowledg of the affairs of this World, the reaſon and very foundation of Prayer will be deſtroyed, which ſuppoſes, that God knows all the Circumſtances of our particular caſe, and does not only hear us when we call upon him in our want and diſtreſs, but alſo that he has both the Power, and the Will, to relieve, or deliver all thoſe who make their humble ſupplications unto him.

Did afflictions happen by meer Chance, we ſhould not know how to behave our ſelves under them, we ſhould have no encouragement to bear them Patiently, nor skill to make a due Proviſion for thoſe which

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may ſeize upon us hereafter, and turn them into a benefit to our Souls.

But when we know from whence they come, and that our Cup, how bitter ſoever it be, was mingled by the merciful hand of our Moſt Gracious Father for the Health of our Souls; with what readineſs and courage ſhall we ſtoop to our Burden, and what an humble and heavenly Temper ſhall we attain by our Sufferings?

Did not God know us, or take notice of our Lives, how could he now Govern the World, or Judge it hereafter? Inſomuch as there is no calling the truth of the Doctrine of Providence into queſtion, without ſtriking at the foundation of all the Arguments for Divine Worſhip, for the Fear and Service of God, for Truſt in his Mercy, and hope in his Aſſiſtance: and without putting an end to every reaſonable thought about future Rewards and Puniſhments.

But though there be a great deal of Malice in the objections againſt Providence, yet upon little examination they will be found weak, and ſuch as cannot ſhake the belief of any who will impartially conſider them.

'Tis

'Tis objected, That for God to have the care of all things upon him, would disturb his Peace; and that for him to condescend to observe the actions of trifling Man, and to have a regard to the small and vilest parcels of the World, would be below the dignity of his Glorious Majesty.

The weakness of this Objection, which is so much flourisht by the *Epicureans*, lyes herein, That they suppose God to be like unto men, who can hardly transact any affair wisely without much thinking; who cannot be concern'd in many things together without great disquiet and trouble. Now the trouble, uneasiness, irresolution and difficulty, which men find in much or great business, does arise from their faculties being stinted: they are fain to turn things up and down in their thoughts, and to work their brains with long consideration before they can resolve what is fit to be done; and after they have resolved, they are as much at a loss for means to accomplish their designs. But what is more evident, than that the boundless Power, Wisdom and Knowledg of God, cannot be exposed to any of these Objections and Difficulties? Therefore to disown Providence in

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the plain conſequence of things, is to deny the exiſtence of an Infinitely perfect Being *.

* Verius eſt iigitur nimirum illud, quod Familiaris omnium noſtrum Poſidonius diſſeruit in libro quinto de natura Deorum, nullos eſſe Deos Epicuro videri; quæque is de Diis immortalibus dixerit, invidiæ deteſtandæ gratiâ dixiſſe. Neque enim tam deſipiens fuiſſet, ut homunculi ſimilem Deum fingeret lineamentis duntaxat extremis, non habitu ſolido, membris hominis præditum omnibus, uſu Membrorum ne minimo quidem, exilem quendam ac perlucidum, nihil cuique tribuentem, nihil gratificantem omnino, nihil curantem, nihil agentem. Quæ natura primum nulla eſſe poteſt, idque videns Epicurus, re tollit, oratione relinquit Deos. *Cic. de nat. Deor. ib.*

And though we may bear with ſuch a ſorry Objection as this in the *Epicures*, who were ſo vain, as to aſcribe the Original of the World, in which do appear ſo many of the marks of deep Skill and Wiſe contrivance, to a Fortuitous concourſe, or caſual jumble of Atomes; yet it would be intolerable in Chriſtians, who profeſs heartily to believe God to be Maker of Heaven and Earth, to hold that he ſhould not think the things Worthy of his Care and Protection, which he once thought Worthy of his Making: or that he ſhould meet with Difficulties and Troubles in Governing the World, who found none in Creating it.

As the firm Belief of Providence is of vaſt concernment to our Souls, ſo the Spirit of God has made many declarations of it, and fully ſet forth all the parts thereof in Holy Scripture,

Scripture, not only how God is pleaſed to engage himſelf in making proviſion for the Children of men, but how his care does extend to the ſmalleſt Creatures, and the meaneſt parts of the Creation.

We are taught not only that the Rational Beings do live and move and ſubſiſt by the Goodneſs of their Maker; but that he condeſcends to feed the little Sparrow, and to cloath the fading Lillies of the Field, and even to number the ſlender Hairs upon our Head.

Furthermore, in the Word of God is ſet forth all the ſorts of Inſtances, in which the Divine Providence does manifeſt it ſelf to men, who ſeem to be the extraordinary Objects of God's Care and Love. There an account is given how God concerns himſelf in our Birth and firſt Production; that he makes the barren Woman to be a joyful Mother of Children; that it is he that takes us out of the Womb; that he is our Hope, and our whole Dependance is upon Him, from the time we hung on our Mothers Breaſts; and that the Mouths of Babes and Sucklings, ſet forth the Praiſe of his Providence.

That the Divine Providence doth not only exerciſe it ſelf about particular Perſons, but reaches unto Societies and Communions, and takes Cities and Nations within it's ſpecial Cogniſance; that both their Proſperity and Sufferings come from him; that *except he keep the City, the watchman waketh* but *in* vain; and that no *Evil happens there, but he hath* done it; and that he ever makes them to Flouriſh or Decline, in proportion to their Virtues or their Sins, the univerſal good of the Creation being the great deſign and meaſure of his Providence.

The Holy Scriptures ſometimes acquaint us with thoſe parts of Providence which relate to God's Infinite Knowledg, and the Righteouſneſs of his Dealings, that nothing which we do or think can be hid from Him, but that all lies open and naked to the Preſence of Him before whom we ſtand; that exact obſervation is made of every turn and deſign in our Lives; that he ſeeth all under the whole Heaven, and looketh unto the ends of the Earth; that our whole behaviour is as it were regiſted in a Book; that at the great Day of Judgment, this Book ſhall be open'd, and we be Sentenc'd to Everlaſting Happineſs

or

or Miſery, according as our Lives ſhall from thence appear to have been Good or Evil.

In our Bibles we learn that God ſuffers Afflictions to fall upon his own People, and are there ſhewn the juſt reaſons of thoſe Proceedings of his, which at firſt view ſeem'd hardly conſiſtent with his immenſe Goodneſs; and that all things in the end ſhall work together for the good of them who love him.

There we alſo learn, that the Preſervation and Continuance of Life, is not in our power, and that length of days does not depend upon our care and skill, but that God keeps the iſſues of Life and Death in his own hand, and we never by any means can be aſſured, how long we have to live, who ſee the days of the weak and ſickly ſometimes extended to very old Age; and they of ſtrong Conſtitutions, and of firm and vigorous health, lopt off in their green Years, and full Strength; and all this, that we may never preſume to ſet Death at a great diſtance from us, but manage the preſent time prudently, and circumſpectly, and not rely upon infinitely contingent Futurity, in the great Affair of our Souls, for the due care of which, we were ſent into the world.

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In this Word of God we find an account not only of the uncertainty of our Lives, but of all the other Goods we poſſeſs, which belong unto the preſent ſtate; that the poſſeſſion we have of them is very precarious, and that of a ſudden we may very many ways be put out of the enjoyment of thoſe things we eſteemed moſt, had kept longeſt, and were moſt ſecure of.

But tho the ways of turning us out of what we have, be many, yet the Holy Scripture gives us good aſſurance, that we ſhall never be diſpoſſeſt of the leaſt good without the Appointment or License of Providence; that as we may not ſet our hearts upon any of the things of the World, which we have, ſo we may bear Loſſes quietly; and without ruffling the Peace of our Minds, and making any abatement of our Love of God, may ſubmit to every change in our condition, with the Patience of *Job*, yielding back to the Lord what he had given.

Sometimes the Scriptures diſcourſe of the ſtrange Changes which are made in Kingdoms; how God pulls men down, and ſets others up by unlikely means, and when they leaſt expected it; and that in an inſtant he ſtript

ſtript them of their vaſt Poſſeſſions, when their Power and Plenty had thruſt him out of all their thoughts, and they placed their ſecurity in their own ſtrength, and did not attribute to his Providence the Glory of their Greatneſs.

Of the wonderful effects of Providence, we have unqueſtionable examples in all Ages, wherein the motion of God's hand hath been ſo viſible, that neceſſity will compel men to aſcribe them to him.

How frequently hath the interpoſition of the Divine Power been clearly manifeſt in the Riſe and Declenſion of Kingdoms, and in the ſurprizing Periods which have been put to mighty Empires by ſmall and improbable Cauſes, notwithſtanding they were founded in deep Policy, and had been of long continuance; he in a moment breaking the firm frame of things, and turning up the Foundations which were laid by the Counſels of the moſt skilful and ſagacious men?

VVhen the meaſure of the ſins of a great People is full, and their Iniquities are grown up to a ripeneſs fit for ruin, ſo that God will no longer endure the abuſe of his Mercies, and the bold affronts which are put upon his

Love

Love and Kindneſs; then Deſtruction comes ſwiftly upon them, and they receive their terrible overthrow from thoſe hands which they did deſpiſe.

Hiſtories of all Countries furniſh us with inſtances of this kind; and we may read abundance of the myſterious variety of the workings of Providence in the quick turns, and amazing changes which did happen to the Kingdoms of *Judah* and *Iſrael*: Either the ſick or the lame have ſtrength enough to pull down the mightieſt Nation, when the crying ſins thereof have provoked God peremptorily to reſolve, that there ſhall be an end put to all its Glory and Power.

Of this caſe we have a memorable declaration made from the Lord to the *Jews*, by the Prophet *Jeremy*, of the fatal Blow which ſhould be given to their Kingdom, even by thoſe they themſelves had beaten; and that only the wounded men which remained, ſhould be ſufficiently able to ſet Fire to their City, and lay it in Aſhes.

Thus ſaith the Lord, Deceive not your ſelves, ſaying, The Chaldeans ſhall ſurely depart from us; for they ſhall not depart; for tho ye had ſmitten the whole army of the Chaldeans, that fight againſt you,

you, and there remained but wounded men among them, yet ſhould they riſe up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire. Now when only the wounded and ſhatter'd remains of a Conquer'd Army, ſhall be able to attack and take a well fortified City, the great diſproportion between the Inſtruments and the Work, muſt force the mouths of the Inhabitants to confeſs, that it is the Lord's doings, and that their Miſery is juſtly pulled down from Heaven, by their abominable ſins.

Wherefore when we behold any Empire or Kingdom that hath been long ſetled, taken deep root, enlarged its Borders, and was a Terror to its Neighbours, to diſſolve on a ſudden, and tumble down, and all the Limbs of this well-built, and often-try'd Body, at once to be diſ-jointed; will not in this ſtrange and unaccountable Revolution, the Prints be moſt conſpicuous and plain, of the All-ſeeing and All-diſpoſing Providence of God, who turns the Wiſdom of the Wiſe into Fooliſhneſs; does not give the Race to the Swift, nor the Battel to the Strong?

On the other hand, to ſee a ſmall Society or Body of Men, preſerv'd when environ'd with

Powerful Enemies, each of which could have devoured it; and its State and Condition ſupported, when they did all conſpire to work its ruin; and Peace and Safety reſtored by moſt improbable means, where there was no appearance or likelihood of it, muſt be a demonſtration that God governs the world, and orders all the affairs thereof.

From hence it is, as the Divine Providence hath wonderfully put forth it ſelf in all times, ſo God ſhews himſelf highly diſpleaſed, when his people preſume to call his Care of them into queſtion, and make any doubt whether he obſerves their behaviour; declaring it to be utterly impoſſible, that he ſhould either neglect or forget them. ----- *For they ſay, the Lord hath forſaken the earth, and the Lord ſeeth not. And as for me alſo, my eye ſhall not ſpare, neither will I have pity. ----But Zion ſaid, The Lord hath forſaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a Woman forget her ſucking children, that ſhe ſhould not have compaſſion on the Son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.*

Ezek. 9. 9, 10.
Iſa. 49. 14, 15.

Thus I have diſpatch'd the firſt Head of this Diſcourſe, namely that nothing can come

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to us through the whole courſe of this life, without the Order, or at leaſt the Permiſſion of Providence; and ſhewn, That not only the Proſperity and Adverſity, the Poverty and Riches, the Wiſdom and Underſtanding, the Length of Days, and Death of particular Perſons, but alſo the Growth and Fall of Nations and Kingdoms, comes from the Lord: *Who humbleth himſelf to behold the things that are done in Heaven and Earth: He ſheweth loving kindneſs unto thouſands, and recompenceth the iniquity of the fathers into the boſom of their Children after them: The great, the mighty God, the Lord of Hoſts is his name, great in counſel, and mighty in works; for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the ſons of men, to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.* Pſal. 113. 6. Jer. 32. 18, 19.

(2.) That we ſhould receive evil from the hand of God, as well as good, is very agreeable to his Wiſdom: In the miſeries God ſends or ſuffers to fall upon men in this life, many of his great Ends in governing the world, are ſerv'd, and much Spiritual Profit may accrue to them, who by the croſs Events and Diſappointments they here encounter,

counter, are wean'd from the world, and will not be drawn in by its moſt alluring Temptations; who every day diſcovering more the vanity of all earthly Pleaſures, have an immediate recourſe to God, and entirely depend upon his Wiſdom and Goodneſs both as to their preſent condition, and that happy one they hope for hereafter.

All men receive Proſperity from God very kindly, tho they frequently make an ill uſe of it; but when he ſends any affliction, how much ſoever they may ſtand in need thereof, they forthwith complain, as if he dealt hardly by them. Nay, when he lays a far lighter Judgment upon them, than their folly and ſin has deſerv'd, and than the preſent ſickly condition of their ſoul did require, immediately both his Juſtice and his Wiſdom muſt be impeached.

Poor man! he thinks he has ſevere uſage, when God is very merciful unto him; and is apt to grumble and be querulous, when the Divine Wiſdom does uſe the moſt proper and ſuitable methods to do his ſoul the greateſt good. Moſt men, if they might chuſe for themſelves, would never have any thing fall croſs

croſs to their own Wills; and the beſt reaſon that may be for their ſufferings, will ſcarce bring them to think well of them, or to judg favourably of him who order'd and ſent them.

This is uſually the perverſe behaviour of thoſe mean ſpirits, in every trouble and diſappointment, who having fixt their hearts upon the goods of this world, do never lift up their hands and eyes towards the Glorious Heavens, or ſpend any thoughts upon the boundleſs Eternity into which they are ready to launch: It is alſo true, That God's own People may ſometimes have their feet ſlip, and be at firſt ſtagger'd by a great evil, which ſuddenly ſurprizes them; but with a little thought and recollection, they recover the due temper of their minds, and diſcern the calamity to be ſo fit and reaſonable for their condition, that they not only frame themſelves to a ſincere ſubmiſſion to God's pleaſure, but devoutly magnifie and praiſe his Name for the ſignal advantage their ſouls will gain thereby.

This is the language of the Saints; *Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth; therefore deſpiſe*

deſpiſe not thou the chaſtning of the Almighty, Job 5. 17. *Whom the Lord loveth, he correcteth*, Prov. 3. 12. *I know, O Lord, that thy Judgments are right; and that thou of faithfulneſs haſt afflicted me*, Pſal. 119. 75.

Theodoret. Tom. 4 p. 376. 'Blaſpheme not God, who makes proviſi-'on for our ſouls with much Wiſdom, and 'great care, and by a ſupply of good things, 'and the fear of ſtripes, does teach us the 'Elements of Virtue, and pulls up the diſeaſe 'of Vice by the roots, and cauſes bright and 'gladſom health in the ſoul.

Now if by every injury againſt their Reputation, every damage in their Eſtate, every loſs of dear relations, every hurt and pain in their Body, and by every melancholly and grievous thought which may happen in their minds, God deſigns not to torment, but to purify and reform his people, there can be no reaſon why they ſhould not accept all in good part which comes, nor why it ſhould be thought a ſtrong Objection againſt the Wiſdom of Providence, That the Righteous now and then ſuffer, and have their ſhare of the afflictions of this world.

But

But becauſe this has been a difficult rub in the way, at which as well the virtuous, as bad men have ſtumbled; in a more particular anſwer thereunto, I deſire the following things may be conſider'd.

(1.) That we are not competent judges any more of the righteouſneſs of men, than of the reaſons of their ſufferings: We that do not know the hearts of men, nor ſee the ſecrets which are lodged there, cannot pronounce who are truly good. Thoſe who make a fair ſhew of Religion, and take pains to have the world think well of them, may have much wickedneſs lurk in their hearts, and privately be exceeding vicious.

But unleſs we knew certainly who were ſincerely virtuous men, and who were hypocrites, we have no right to make this Objection; and it will be very unjuſt and preſumptuous in us, to charge it as a defect and blemiſh in the Divine Providence, That the Righteous are frequently afflicted; ſince that which may look like an undeſerv'd Calamity of a good man, may, for ought we know, be but a juſt

a juſt Judgment of God, inflicted upon him for his Hypocriſie.

(2.) Neither are we competent judges of the happy or miſerable ſtate, of the Proſperity or Calamities of men. * Thoſe who to us appear the happy Perſons, may have ſo many unruly Paſſions within their breaſts, that in a manner teat their ſouls in pieces, and ſour all the Comforts and Pleaſures which their Greatneſs, Honour, or Plenty ſhould produce.

* *Let us not ſo far ſtray from the Truth, as to think any wicked man can be happy, becauſe he is richer than* Crœſus; *more quickſighted than* Lynceus; *ſtronger than* MiloCrotoniates; *or more beautiful than* Ganymedes: *For he that has enſlaved his mind to a thouſand maſters, to love Concupiſcence, Pleaſure, Fear, [redacted] Folly, Luſt, Injuſtice, can never be happy.* Philo de Provident. Euſeb. Præp. Ev. p. 387.

On the contrary, thoſe who in our eyes paſs for vile and contemptible wretches, may have that peace in their minds, being hurried by no maſterleſs luſt, nor tortur'd with the guilt of any ſin; may have that joy ſpringing up in their ſouls conſtantly, from a ſenſe of the Favour of God, and the conſcience of their doing good to their fellow-creatures, that they would not change conditions with the greateſt Monarch upon Earth.

Poſ-

Poſſibly good men may be ſtraitned with Poverty, and have little Authority and Intereſt in the world; and yet for all this, they are ſtill happy; for happineſs does not conſiſt in abundance of Riches, nor a large compaſs of Power.

Theſe things to them would have been a burden, and they therefore never ſought them; but a compoſed mind, devout thoughts, eaſineſs in every condition, a chearful reſignation of themſelves, and of what they had, to the Will of God, when Croſſes and Sickneſs, and Diſgrace and Loſſes ſhould come, is what they heartily deſired, and what they earneſtly prayed for, and what God graciouſly was pleaſed to give them, and in the enjoyment whereof they find real and moſt intenſe happineſs.

Hence we may be inſtructed how to take the meaſures of our Felicity, and to form a true judgment who are the happy, who the miſerable men.

That no man is happy by reaſon of his vaſt Riches, but Generous Mind, which makes him to live above them, and inclines him to the higheſt Inſtances of Charity; ſo that he

is merciful and lendeth; he diſperſeth and giveth to the poor, and the acts of his Bounty ſhall be had in everlaſting remembrance.

That no perſon is miſerable, becauſe by the malice of deſigning men he may be turned out of his Native Soil; ſince he may bear his Calamity ſo evenly, and with ſuch Submiſſion to Providence, as thereby to enſure to himſelf an habitation in the Heavenly and Eternal Countrey, from whence all the Powers of Darkneſs can never baniſh him.

That a man is not happy becauſe he has a healthy and ſtrong Body; but becauſe in an infirm and ſickly one, he does carefully preſerve a ſound and ſpotleſs mind.

That he is not miſerable who meets with much unkind uſage, and upon whom many croſs and ſharp things do fall; But he, who being beſotted with proſperous Succeſſes, doth lift up his eyes no higher, but ſits down with the brittle and deceitful Goods of the preſent ſtate, and only among them ſeeks for reſt. Thus it is manifeſt, that real Felicity does conſiſt in the Innocence and Tranquility of the Mind.

But

But notwithſtauding in the general we may pronounce all thoſe happy, who have quiet and unblemiſh'd Souls; yet we cannot ſpeak with confidence, as to the happineſs or miſery of particular men, becauſe by their outward Circumſtances, and appearance to the World, we can never be certain of the ſincerity of their minds, nor whether they have thoſe Virtues in their Poſſeſſion, which cauſe ſolid Happineſs. Wherefore ſeeing we are not competently qualified to judg either of the Piety or of the Happineſs of particular men, it evidently follows, That there is very little in that Popular Objection againſt the Divine Providence, taken from the ſeeming Adverſity of the Good, and flouriſhing ſtate of the Wicked.

Further; Neither is it any diſparagement of Providence, nor unkindneſs in God towards his faithful ſervants, that ſometimes he tranſlates them early from hence, and permits them to dye in the vigour of their years: For can a greater favour be done them for their ſhort and faithful ſervice, than for God to remove them not only from the dangers and temptations to ſin, but alſo from

the manifold troubles and vexations of this life, unto his everlaſting Mercies? He does this in honour to them, that the wicked may behold and be concern'd, they are no longer worthy of them, nor of the Good they might receive from their Holy and Wiſe Converſation: Beſides, when the Juſtice of God has decreed ſome dreadful Judgment againſt a wicked Nation, he often takes away his own People from the Evil to come.

Wiſd. 4. 7, 10, 13, 14. *But tho the righteous be prevented with death, yet ſhall he be in reſt; for honourable age is not, which ſtandeth in length of time, nor that is meaſured by number of years; but wiſdom is the gray hair unto men, and an unſpotted life is old age. He pleaſed God, and was beloved of him; ſo that living among ſinners he was tranſlated. He being made perfect in a ſhort time, fulfilled a long time; for his ſoul pleaſed the Lord; therefore haſted he to take him away from among the wicked.*

(3.) It is to be conſider'd, that the condition of the World is ſuch, that there is a neceſſity the Virtuous ſhould often be expoſed to the ſame Troubles and Misfortunes which happen to the Ungodly: And as the Wiſe Man ſpeaks, *There will be one event to the righte-*

ous

ous and to the wicked; for the Calamities of War, Peſtilence, Famine, and Fire, involve men of all Conditions, and take in the Holy with the Sinners. Neither the Nipping Froſts, nor ſcorching Heats, nor raging Floods, nor blaſting Winds, make any difference between the lands of pious and bad Men; nor can a ſtorm at Sea, diſtinguiſh between their Goods which are in the ſame Veſſel.

For a Man to look that God ſhould exempt him from theſe publick Evils, is to expect he ſhould alter the Courſe of Nature for his ſake, which is wiſely eſtabliſh'd, and for great ends; and therefore all ſuch hopes can have no ground, and muſt be deem'd very unreaſonable.

(4.) Notwithſtanding ſuch common Calamities cannot be avoided, yet God always intends our good in every harſh diſappointment which we meet with; and it will admirably ſerve to mend the temper of our Minds. By Adverſity, which God never lets looſe upon us before it is uſeful for us, he makes an experiment of the reality of our affections towards him, whom we ought infinitely to eſteem above all other things; by

it

it God tries our Conſtancy; whether we will equally Love him, and preſerve as great a Reverence for him in the days of our Sorrow, as when he crown'd us with plenty? And if upon this Trial we entertain as honourable thoughts of the proceedings of his Providence, as when the World went well with us, he has attained his end in Viſiting us, and will quickly deliver us from our Grievance. For if under the ſoreſt Croſſes, the heavieſt Loſſes, and ſharpeſt Pains, we uphold in our Souls as worthy opinions of God's Adminiſtration of Affairs, as when he enricht us with his Bleſſings; then we ſhall make an undoubted diſcovery of the ſincerity of our Love of Him; and it will be evident to men, that we value the Peace of Conſcience, and his Favour, above all ſenſual comforts.

Beſides, nothing will more leſſen our eſteem of theſe mean and deſpicable pleaſures, nor take off the edg of our deſire for them, than frequently to be diſturbed in the enjoyment of them, and to have them forced away, when we were moſt delighted with them, and confidently promiſed to our ſelves their long continuance.

It

It may indeed be a general Obſervation, that much Proſperity corrupts mens Morals, and tempts them to rely upon their own Powers; but Adverſity reforms their Lives, and teaches them to know their own weakneſs and wants, which they perceive would grow inſupportable, did God once withdraw his Aſſiſtance.

Wherefore ſeeing it is ſo much harder to walk uprightly before God in a flouriſhing condition, that make us apt to forget him, than in an afflicted ſtate, which naturally diſpoſes us to ſeek the Lord, is there any reaſon, why we ſhould thus murmur at his Rod, and repine when he Corrects us with the tenderneſs of a Father, and viſits us with his Judgments, only that he may heal our ſpiritual diſeaſes?

How terrible ſoever any Calamity may appear to us, yet it is fitted to our Circumſtances, and is not greater than the crazy ſtate of our Souls does ſtand in need of. For Troubles do not ſpring caſually out of the Earth; or fall upon us without meaſure or bounds: But God in his Wiſdom does order the time when we ſhall be Afflicted; he determines the kind of Evil which ſhall fall to our Lot,

Lot, and metes the very quantity that we muſt Suffer. Which as ſoon as it has Humbled our Vanity, or extinguiſh'd our Luſt, or abated our Love of Riches, and reduced us to juſt apprehenſions of our ſelves, he certainly will recall from us, and let in the light of his countenance into our hearts.

Now this being the true ſtate of things, as will be plain to every honeſt enquirer, it may be matter of wonder, why men take Afflictions ſo ill at the hand of God, when they know they proceed from his Love; and behave themſelves ſo untowardly under almoſt every degree of Adverſity.

A great cauſe of all this, I judge to be, their making ſlight or no preparations for Afflictions before they come. Now there is that diſtraction and diſorder raiſed in the Spirit of a man, who is ſurprized with any Calamity, that he toſſeth like a Bull in a Net, and has not temper enough left to conſider of the great Cauſes there were to move God to lay it upon him, or of the ſweet fruit he might gather from it by a modeſt and quiet carriage under the heavenly Diſcipline, and a total Submiſſion of himſelf to the will of his Merciful Father. Thev

They therefore who would bear troubles well, muſt live in a conſtant expectation of them, and in their good days lay up a ſtock of Chriſtian Graces againſt the Winter of Adverſity. They, I ſay, who in the height of their Proſperity, will often and ſeriouſly reflect upon the great change, that either by Loſſes and Pains, or certainly by Death, in a ſhort time will overtake them, and provide themſelves with the ſuffering-Virtues againſt that dark ſeaſon, will be ſo far from having their ſpirits ſink at the approach either of Afflictions or Death it ſelf, that it will raiſe them above the World, and mount and carry their Hearts and Affections to God, who is the Centre of all ſound Peace, and ſolid Joy.

How happy are thoſe ſouls, who when the World moſt ſmiles upon them, do not truſt it; but furniſh themſelves with the Humility, and the Meekneſs, and the Patience of Jeſus againſt the evil day; that as no Sickneſs or Trouble can much ſurprize them, ſo neither can it greatly, or long diſcompoſe their minds; but they diſcern the Finger of God in it, and turn it to their ſpiritual advantage.

And they therefore *count it joy, when they fall into Temptations*; i. e. ſuffer affliction; for they are aſſured, that God will not ſuffer them to be tempted above what they are able: *If they are troubled on every ſide, yet they ſhall not be diſtreſſed; if they are perplexed, they ſhall not deſpair; if they are perſecuted, they ſhall not be forſaken; if caſt down, they ſhall not be deſtroyed.*

SER-

SERMON II.

III. THAT if we equally conſider things, we ſhall be conſtrain'd to acknowledg, That God's Goodneſs and Mercy do appear in our greateſt Sufferings; and this will be evident from the following Reaſons.

(1.) Becauſe, if we look upon God as the Supreme Lord and Owner of the World, who alone has the Right of all, we ſhall find our ſelves to be but Tenants at will, for every thing that we have: And if God has given us nothing, but during pleaſure, then let him take it away when he pleaſes, he can do us no wrong.

Our Life, that makes us capable of his other Favours; our Health, which makes

life comfortable; our Relations, our Eſtates, our Eaſe and Peace, are all the free Gifts of the Bounty of him, who had not the leaſt Obligation to us; and if he revoke them all, or any of them, we receive no Injury; for he does but reſume his own Right.

Inſomuch, as if God ſtrips us of all down to nothing, he will but leave us in the ſtate he found us: Wherefore we ought to be ſo far from charging him with unkindneſs for any temporal Evil, that we muſt own, it is his ſingular Goodneſs we have been permitted the Enjoyment of ſo many of his Bleſſings ſuch a long time.

(2.) We cannot but acknowledg the Goodneſs of God in our Troubles and Loſſes, when we conſider him as the great Judg of the Lives of Men, and examine the Conditions upon which he was pleaſed to grant the uſe of his Creatures unto them, and the Puniſhments he has threatned to inflict upon the diſobedient.

Upon this Examination it will be plain to the greateſt Sufferers, that God has been merciful, in that they, in many particulars, have

have broken the Conditions of the Covenant, which was made between him and them, and he has not taken the whole forfeiture.

There is no breach of God's Law, in any great inſtance, made coolly and deliberately, but it does deſerve, not only a temporal puniſhment, but the pains of Hell, ſhould God deal with us according to the meaſures of ſtrict Juſtice. Now, when he, who if he proceeded ſtrictly againſt us, might paſs the Sentence of Death upon us, and ſhut us out of his preſence for ever, does but gently correct us with ſuch chaſtiſements as are proper to reform our faults, and cauſe us to grieve we have offended our beſt Friend; What can we do but admire his Goodneſs, and magnify the riches of his Mercy towards us!

If God did not let ſinners, who have lived a great while ſecurely in their iniquity, at length feel the weight of his Juſtice, they would lay aſide all fear of his Power, and fall into ruin beyond a poſſibility of being recover'd. But yet we may obſerve, That there is a plentiful mixture of Mercy

Mercy in the Puniſhments which God firſt inflicts upon the greateſt ſinners; and that he does not proceed to high degrees of ſeverity, until their hearts are ſo hard, that lighter Afflictions would make no impreſſion upon them.

Wherefore when very bad Men are brought to Repentance by a terrible Judgment, they diſcern God's Goodneſs in nothing more, than the terrour which attended the Judgment wherewith he corrected them; becauſe they are ſenſible it would not have reclaim'd them from their wicked Courſes, had it been of a milder ſort.

God then tempers Judgment with Mercy, that as the contemplation of the one may preſerve in Mens minds an awful regard of his Majeſty, ſo the conſideration of the other may keep them from running into deſpair. Where Sinners are become bold, more of his Juſtice is requiſite to make them dread his diſpleaſure, and to acknowledg the infirmities of their own Nature; but on the contrary, where ſuch a tenderneſs is found in the Conſciences of Men, that

that they are extream fearful of their condition, notwithſtanding to the beſt of their ability they ſincerely endeavour to ſerve him; he is ſo far from putting any unneceſſary hardſhip upon them, that he letteth forth the treaſures of his Compaſſion upon their diſturb'd Souls, does ſcatter their groundleſs fears, and refreſh and cheriſh them with his Mercies.

There is no want of proof to convince Men, that as all the temporal evils they ſuffer are leſs than in rigour of juſtice God might lay upon them; ſo they never overtake them, before they are neceſſary either to make them reflect upon the Errors of their own ways, or to put a ſtop to others in a bad Courſe.

The Servants of God, who have been renowned for their Piety, and whoſe holy deeds, and glorious ſufferings in the Cauſe of Religion, have been recorded by the Holy Ghoſt for the imitation of the Followers of Chriſt, and the ſupport of all afflicted Saints, theſe eminent inſtruments in the work of the Lord, I ſay, have ever been ſo ſenſible of their own frailty, as to dread the Divine Juſtice. They

They never did preſume to inſiſt upon their own Righteouſneſs, when they came before God, as if they had lived with ſuch exactneſs, according to his Laws, that he could not afflict them, without being injurious. They were not ſuch ſtrangers to themſelves, as not to be conſcious, that in a great number of reſpects their behaviour came ſhort of perfection; which alone can juſtify a Man. Wherefore we ſhall never find that they appeal to their Innocence, when they have to deal with their Righteous Judge; but full of the apprehenſion of their guilt, they caſt themſelves at his feet, and addreſs their Cauſe wholly to his Mercy.

David, a Man after God's own heart, openly confeſſes to him, *If thou, Lord, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiſs, O Lord, who may abide it! i. e.* If God ſhould reckon with the beſt Man in the World for his Sins, and paſs Sentence upon him according to his demerits, his Puniſhment would be intolerable: Therefore he flies to his Compaſſion, *Enter not into judgment with thy ſervant, for in thy ſight ſhall no man living be juſtified.* *Job*,

Job, who being aſſaulted with many violent Temptations, and haraſs'd with a number of bitter Calamities, yet ſinned not, durſt not however ſtand upon his own Integrity; or think he could make a compleat defence of his Life to God: For in anſwer to his Friend, who had wiſely obſerved, *That mortal Man could not be more juſt than God, or more pure than his Maker*; he ſays, *I know it is ſo of a truth: but how ſhould man be juſt with God? or if he will contend with him, he cannot anſwer him, one of a thouſand.*

Jeremiah, after he had made a large Liſt of the Troubles and Calamities of God's People, charges no Injuſtice upon him, as if he had treated them more ſeverely than their Caſe deſerv'd; but quite otherwiſe, he humbly acknowledges, That it was due to the Divine Goodneſs, that they fared no worſe. *It is the Lord's mercy we are not conſumed, becauſe his compaſſions fail not.* And of this the Prophet gives a good reaſon; becauſe Life, and all a Man enjoys by that capacity, which is preferable to nothing, is the free grant of God. *Where-*

fore doth a living Man complain, a Man for the puniſhment of his Sins? i. e. While a Sinner has Life, he hath more than he can claim, and therefore hath no cauſe to find fault with any ſmaller evil that God corrects him with for his crimes.

(3.) We muſt acknowledg the Divine Goodneſs in our Loſſes and Sufferings; when we conſider, that in the Goſpel there is no expreſs Covenant, obliging God to beſtow temporal proſperity upon Holy Men. In the Chriſtian Religion there is no abſolute promiſe of worldly Power, Honour, or Wealth, even to them who do perform the Conditions thereof.

And if God has not tied himſelf to preſerve the Saints always in a flouriſhing ſtate, Shall they who are wicked expect it from him? Shall the Sinners demand that, as juſtly belonging to them, which he has not made a debt to the beſt of his Servants? Wherefore, if God be under no obligation in the Goſpel to beſtow a greater ſhare of the things of the

the World, which are by Men ſo fiercely ſought after, than what is neceſſary to Life, he does not, in depriving us of any of our ſuperfluities, break any one Condition of the Covenant between us; ſince the ſmalleſt Secular conveniency in our poſſeſſion, is more than we can claim, or than he contracted for. Our Saviour was ſo far from making any engagement, That they who are his Diſciples ſhould all be Rich, or Rulers, or Men of intereſt in the World; that he has declared, Father and Mother, and Wife and Children, and Houſes, and Lands, muſt all be forſaken, where they cannot longer be had without doing diſhonour to his Holy Name, or breaking the Laws of his Religion.

And becauſe upon account of their Relations, or Riches, or Power, Men would meet with the moſt prevailing temptations to tranſgreſs the Precepts of the Goſpel, it is that Chriſt does pronounce, That *it is eaſier for a Camel to go through the eye of a Needle, than for a rich Man to enter into the Kingdom of God.*

May we not then be ſure, that Chriſt would not encourage his Friends to hope for a conſtant and ſteddy current of Plenty, and Honours and Pleaſure, when theſe things powerfully draw their affections from him, and tempt them to blot him out of their thoughts? His Kingdom being of another World, none of the Glories of this are neceſſary to the attainment of it.

And as we do not find, that our Lord made any promiſe to Chriſtians of an abundance of things, highly valued by the Men of this World; ſo neither do we obſerve, that he treats Great Men with more reſpect, or gives them cauſe to expect they ſhall have kinder uſage, or receive more favours from him, than the Poor, and thoſe of low Rank. He has made no ſpecial Promiſes to the Rich, and Celebrated and Popular Perſons: But the Beatitudes deſcend upon the Heads of Men of quite other Qualification: Not their outward Circumſtances, but the holy diſpoſitions in their Souls, procure and fetch down his Bleſſings. He bleſſes the

the Humble, the Poor in Spirit, the Holy Mourners, the Meek, they that hunger and thirſt after Righteouſneſs, and earneſtly deſire to fulfil God's Juſt and Good Will; the Merciful, the Pure in Heart, the Peace-makers, and they that ſuffer Perſecution, and are evil ſpoke of by all for Righteouſneſs ſake.

And hence it follows, that no body by reaſon of their Wealth or Honour, are greater objects of Chriſt's love, or come more within the Verge of his Care; but that men of mean and contemptible ſtate, are as much under the Protection of his Providence, as thoſe of higheſt Quality; have as plentiful a Portion of his Grace, and ſtand in as near a capacity to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Had our Lord come into the world incircled with all that Pomp and Power which the *Jews* expected the Meſſias ſhould appear with, as he could have been no Example of Sufferings to his Followers, ſo would they have been tempted to arrive at ſome degrees of their Maſter's Glory, and have ſet their Hearts upon the Greatneſs and

and Splendors of the preſent ſtate, when it was ſo principal a part of his work, to teach his Diſciples to neglect and deſpiſe them.

Since then the Poſſeſſion of a large Portion of worldly Goods, is no part of the Bargain Jeſus Chriſt made with men in his Religion, who only promiſes a Supply of the Neceſſaries of Life; and ſince men, for the moſt part, have more than what is barely neceſſary to ſuſtain them, they muſt acknowledg their great Obligation to the Divine Goodneſs, with reſpect of the fulneſs and eaſe of their condition here upon Earth.

How much men under the Chriſtian Law, owe to the Bounty of God, more than by the terms of it they could demand, is plain, notwithſtanding you ſuppoſe them to perform every condition of the Goſpel, and to live in a ſtate of innocence; but look upon them what really they are, as vile ſinners, and then in God's uſage of the greateſt Sufferers, enough will appear to clear the Juſtice of his dealings, and to convince them, who complain moſt bitterly,

That

That he has been Gracious, and corrected them with Mercy.

But further; When we reflect upon the utter averſeneſs of the world to the deſigns of Chriſt's Religion, and the deep Malice which it bears againſt thoſe who ſincerely profeſs it, as we ſhall ſee reaſon to believe and expect, that thoſe who live godly in Chriſt Jeſus, ſhould ſuffer affliction; ſo alſo all good men may to their unſpeakable joy obſerve, That their Religion does mightily thrive, when the wicked moſt endeavour to ſuppreſs it; and that nothing more refines the Lives of Chriſtians, and makes them come up to the Purity in the Goſpel required, than Perſecution.

Of that part of Providence which extracts Good out of Evil, the Ancient Father diſcourſes well; 'It is, ſaith he, the 'greateſt Argument of Divine Providence, 'that it not only altogether deſtroys the 'hurtful quality of the Evil which proceeds 'from the Apoſtacy of Human Will; but 'alſo does not ſuffer it to abide uſeleſs and 'unprofitable; for it is the buſineſs of the 'Divine Wiſdom, Virtue, and Power, not only

'only to do good (for that is the Nature of 'God, to ſay it once for all, as much as it 'is of Fire to burn, and of Light to ſhine), 'but eſpecially to order and direct, that 'the Devices of the Wicked ſhould ſerve to 'good and uſeful Purpoſes.

Clem. Alex. Strom. lib. 1. p. 312.

As therefore it is in the nature of Unbelievers, and of the Prophane, to hate the People of God, and to deal cruelly by them; ſo it is God's Will to ſuffer it, that thereby his own may be improved in that Piety and Virtue which will prepare them for his Preſence, and incline him to take them out of all their Troubles the ſooner unto himſelf.

And tho it be a great crime in naughty men to perſecute the Servants of God, yet they have the leſs reaſon to complain of it, or to be very uneaſie when afflicted; becauſe their ſufferings do tend ſo much to their Perfection. Nay, on the contrary, they ought to eſteem it as a mark and token of God's Kindneſs, that he is pleaſed to better and advance their Nature, even by Adverſity. And it is no leſs than a demonſtration of Infinite Wiſdom, that the

Plots

Plots which are laid to ruin the Saints, ſhould make them more perfect; and that, to the aſtoniſhment of all men, the Spight and Cruelty of Perſecutors ſhould make Religion take deeper root, to grow the faſter, and in the ſhorter time to ſpread it ſelf over the face of the Earth.

If indeed we regard the Malice and Rage of men, certainly enough has been attempted to baniſh the Goſpel and Name of Jeſus Chriſt out of the World, had not God appeared on its ſide, and maintained his own Cauſe and People. And while God is with us, and does ſupport the Intereſt of the Religion wherein we are engaged, we may remain confident, that Captivity, Impriſonment, Bonds, and Scourges, how much ſoever at preſent they may terrifie and grieve us, yet they ſhall never overthrow the Chriſtian Church, or reduce to a ſtate of Deſparation, the ſincere Believers; but God's ſpecial Grace will help and carry them through troubles of

every kind and degree, and make all conclude in their Salvation.

Let us then not hope either that the Wicked ſhould alter the Perverſeneſs of their Natures; or that for our ſakes God ſhould change the Wiſe Methods of his Providence. Let us not think we ſhall have kinder uſage from the World, than Chriſt and his Apoſtles had, and than the Army of Martyrs and Confeſſors, and all the Primitive Chriſtians did meet with.

But as we are baptized into the Name of Chriſt, ſo never let us be aſham'd openly to profeſs it, or afraid to bear the Croſs of our dear Maſter: *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.* And let us ſteddily *look unto Jeſus the author and finiſher of our faith, who for the joy which was ſet before him, endured the croſs, deſpiſing the ſhame, and is ſet down at the right hand of the Throne of God; for conſider him that endured ſuch contradiction of ſinners againſt himſelf, leſt ye be wearied, and faint in your minds.* Heb. 12. 23.

(4.) We

(4.) We muſt acknowledg the Goodneſs of God, whether in Sickneſs, Pain, or Trouble, when we place our Meditations on the ineſtimable Rewards of the next Life, which he has provided to recompence the Sufferings of Holy Men in this. Our deep ignorance of the Joys of the other Life, will make all things ſaid of them, to be with great diſadvantage. The Philoſophers, and Men of refined Reaſon, were generally poſſeſt with the Belief of a Future State; of which yet their Diſcourſes are obſcure, and full of uncertainty; and when they handle this Argument, they are often inconſiſtent with themſelves. Neither need this be a wonder; ſince it is not to be imagined that by Natural Light, we ſhould be able to make any large diſcovery of the Pleaſures of Heaven: For they do ſo vaſtly differ from Worldly Enjoyments, and ſo infinitely ſurpaſs all the Pleaſures of Senſe, that our preſent Experience will not at all enable us to frame a Conception of them.

So that the beſt Information we are to expect in this matter, muſt be from the Holy Scripture; neither doth that it ſelf deſcend into a particular deſcription of the nature of Heavenly Joys: The Spirit thought it ſufficient for the ſupport of our Faith, to give a general account of the uncounceivable Happineſs of the Future Life; and to let us have full aſſurance that it ſhould be the Portion of all thoſe, who ſhall to the end perſevere in a ſincere obedience to the Laws of the Goſpel. And notwithſtanding, the beſt Progreſs we can make in our enquiry after the Delights of the Glorious World above, will be chiefly by Negatives; *for eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, neither have entred into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him*; yet the conſideration of them, will be mighty comfortable, and enough to make us bear up under all the Preſſures and Troubles which ſhall attend the Croſs of Chriſt.

In Heaven we ſhall be free from all Sins; and from every Temptation to do evil,

evil, which now proceeds from ſo huge a number of cauſes and occaſions. We ſhall be placed above the reach of the Malice and Power of the Devil; whoſe perpetual work it is, to lay Plots to corrupt our Innocence, to take and enſnare our Souls by his cunning Devices.

We ſhall be removed from the ſight and company of bad men, who by their ill example, and reſtleſs importunity, are ever inticing us to ſin. We now converſe among the dangerous Enemies of our Souls, who have a conſtant eye upon us; ſo that if we do but forbear to watch never ſo little, they will ſurprize us; if we do not walk circumſpectly, we preſently ſhall be made to fall; if we do not pray continually, the wicked will prove too ſtrong for us, and deceive us with the gaudy appearance of their tempting baits.

O what a perpetual ſtruggle have we with our Luſts! and how much pains does it coſt to overcome them, when they violently preſs upon us!

What

What a Vexation and Grief is it to our Minds, that we find it ſo hard to ſubdue the Motions to almoſt every ſin! Nay, that thoſe Luſts which we have conquered, ſhould rally their Forces, aſſault us afreſh, and ſometimes prove too many for us, and often ſo terrifie us, as to make the Victory hazardous! ſo that we are fain to cry out with the great Apoſtle, O wretched creatures that we are, who ſhall deliver us from this body of Death! Who ſhall deliver us from the Tyranny of our impetuous Luſts, which are always labouring to get the Rule over us, and would lead us captive into the Gates of Death! We have not ſtrength enough in our ſelves; nothing but the Grace of God, and the cheriſhing Influences of his Holy Spirit, will enable us to get the Maſtery over our own Rebellious Appetites.

So difficult it is for the Spirit to conquer the Fleſh, and to drive Satan out of his ſtrong-holds; who will diſpute every Paſs, and contend every point with us; and

and never yield, while we allow him the leaſt encouragement.

O what fears muſt be injected into the hearts of faint and timorous Chriſtians, by their being conſtantly plyed with ſuch implacable Adverſaries! To ſerve God indeed, is their real deſire, and they love him with all their hearts; but deſpair holding out under theſe furious and hourly attacks of the Powers of Hell. They dread they ſhall fall away in this day of heavy tribulation, and would give all they were worth, to be ſecured from the danger and trouble of their Temptations.

Now in the next world, theſe Sorrows, and Fears and Dangers, which are here ſo frightful and ſo conſtant, will all be at an end: And what an undiſturbed Peace, and equality of Temper will the Mind poſſeſs, when it is got paſt the hazard of all kinds of Temptation; when the Fleſh ſhall be entirely ſubject to the Spirit, and make no further oppoſition to its reaſonable dictates; and there ſhall be nothing which can raiſe the leaſt commotion

motion or diſorder within it; but it ſhall abide in an uninterrupted courſe of Innocence; and behold all its Enemies lying ſlain before it, as the *Iſraelites* did with Joy and Triumph look back upon the drowned *Egyptians*, floting on the *Red Sea*.

And as we ſhall be freed from the Power of Sin, ſo we ſhall get rid of all the Vexations, Grievances, and Miſeries of this world; many of which are the natural fruit, and proper effects of our ſins. We ſhall be ſtrangers to the drudgery and labours, which are ſo neceſſary to get a Livelihood in this earthly ſtate, and to all the fears and cares which are needful to preſerve our Gains, and to convey them down ſafe and entire to our Children and Poſterity. Neither Poverty, nor Contempt, nor Diſgrace, will threaten us; neither the Covetouſneſs of men will leſſen our Plenty, nor their Perverſeneſs diſturb our Peace, nor their Cruelty bring any Hardſhip upon us: We ſhall meet with no Difficulties to perplex our Thoughts, nor Dangers to exerciſe

exerciſe our Fears; but abide in a ſtate of perpetual Love and Friendſhip with all our fellow-creatures.

And as in the Regions of Heaven we ſhall get above the Power of Temptation, the Malice of ill men, and all the Calamities of the lower World; ſo ſhall theſe infirm, crazy, and fading Bodies, which ſtand in need of daily ſupplies to repair their decays, and which miniſter fuel conſtantly to our Paſſions, be changed into Incorruptible, Heavenly, and Immortal ones; which will not ſolicite and make the Soul uneaſie with their hunger; nor clog and burden it with their weight; nor diſcourage and grieve it with their groſs and melancholly fumes; nor ſpot and defile it with their Luſt. We ſhall know nothing more of Diſeaſes, nor Pains and Aches, nor Hunger nor Thirſt. *They hunger no more, neither thirſt any more; for the Lamb which is in the midſt of the Throne, ſhall feed them; and ſhall lead them unto living Fountains of Waters.* Then we ſhall be clothed with Robes of Beautiful Light, and the Righ-

teous ſhall ſhine as the Stars of the Firmament for ever.

In that Holy Place our Deſires will be gratified; our Appetites will have full ſatisfaction; our higheſt expectations will be anſwer'd; and all our hopes turn'd into Fruition: But notwithſtanding every capacity of our nature will be filled with its proper pleaſure, yet they ſhall never be glutted; but as the Favours of Heaven increaſe, ſo will our Faculties be more and more enlarged to receive them: And although there ſhall be no end of our Joys, yet their perpetual abode will never cloy us; who ſhall to all Eternity be improving into a greater Likeneſs of God; and ſtill attain thereby to a higher and more quick and ſenſible Reliſh of our Heavenly Delights.

Then we ſhall be admitted into the moſt deſirable and pleaſing Company: We ſhall converſe with Angels, and be of the Society of all the Holy Men, who have been ſo renown'd in their Generations, and have ſet thoſe admirable Examples of Godlineſs and Virtue. There

we

we ſhall ſit down by our neareſt and moſt dear Relations, whoſe departure hence was ſo terrible and grievous to us; by our beſt Friends, Neighbours, and Acquaintance, and love and rejoice together, and praiſe the Lord for the great good, which by our mutual Piety we did one to another.

O then we ſhall behold the Glorious Face of our Ever-Bleſſed Redeemer, who ſacrificed his own Blood to reſcue us from the Power and Guilt of our Sins, and to bring us into this moſt illuſtrious Habitation! And that which ſwallows all the Powers of our Imagination, we ſhall come into the Preſence of the great and mighty God, and ſee him as he is, and for ever be taken up in rapturous contemplations of the inconceivable brightneſs and ſplendor of his Infinite Majeſty.

Now when we duly conſider that theſe ſhall be the unexpreſſible Rewards of our ſlight and ſhort Afflictions, will it not appear moſt juſt and reaſonable that we ſhould ſubmit to the Will of God in all things?

As nothing will tend more to God's Glory, ſo nothing will agree more with our Intereſt, or more produce true Comfort and Peace in our Minds, than thankfully to receive all that God gives, and patiently and meekly to bear the loſs of all he takes away; who will ſo infinitely recompence all our ſufferings for his ſake in the next life.

And ſince God has provided ſuch Joys for our Souls in the other State, O that he would quicken our Deſires, and help our Endeavours to prepare our ſelves for them! Seeing he hath been pleaſed to chuſe our Bodies for Temples for his Holy Spirit to dwell in, O that he would free them from all Malice and Impurity, and chaſe away every ſtrange and filthy Luſt from his choſen Habitation!

O that we might have ſo lively a ſenſe of the Goodneſs of the Lord, and of the Infinite Advantage we ſhall gain therefrom, as not to give ſleep to our eyes, nor ſlumber to our eye-lids, until from the bottom of our Hearts, we had repented of every ſin; until we had work-

worked up our Souls to an utter hatred of it, and obſtinately reſolv'd to forſake it; until laying aſide all the Thoughts and Intereſts of this World, we had employed our Souls wholly in making a firm, well-grounded, and laſting Peace with our God.

May we ſo frequently meditate on the Glories of his Nature, as earneſtly to labour and ſtrive to grow like him in his Truth, and Purity, and Love, and Mercy. May we ſo often ſpend our thoughts on Heaven, that the Joys thereof may deeply affect our ſouls, and become moſt deſirable unto us.

Did we deliberately conſider theſe things, it can be no queſtion, but we ſhould make it the great buſineſs of our whole lives, to fit and duly qualifie our ſelves for the Kingdom of Heaven. We ſhould abundantly more endeavour to live as the Righteous man doth, did we oftner reflect upon the unſpeakable Comforts which attend his Death; did we but ſeriouſly think upon the Peace and Joy with which he finiſheth his courſe, and departs this Life. For

For Death will only be to him a Paſſage from bad Men, and malicious Devils, to Holy Angels, and Innocent and Bleſſed Souls; from Labours, and Troubles, and Toils, to perpetual Eaſe and Quiet, and moſt durable Satisfaction; from Pains and Grief, and Sickneſs, to Everlaſting Delights.

When the Wicked ſhall begin to tremble, and their hearts to fail and ſink within them, and their Conſciences to aſtoniſh and amaze them with a full and lively Repreſentation of their many vile ſins, and the notorious and ſhameful abuſes they have put upon all God's tender Mercies, and of the intolerable ſlights and contempt with which they have received his Numerous and kind Invitations to turn from their evil ways and live; and when there ſhall be no other Proſpect before their Eyes, but that of Miſery, Horror, and Confuſion; then ſhall you good Chriſtians look up towards Heaven, and behold certain ſigns of your Salvation drawing near.

O in what a Tranſport of Pleaſure will your Souls be, in the minute they are reunited to your Bodies, and ſhall behold that moſt Bleſſed and moſt dear Saviour approching towards you on a bright Cloud, whom you have ſerved with all your Powers, and the greateſt and moſt ſolicitous Care, to the end of your days; whom you have loved above all, and denied the fierceſt Appetites of the Fleſh, and ſtoutly reſiſted the moſt preſſing Temptations of the World, that you might follow him, and exactly conform your ſelves to his moſt Holy Example: When this Glorious Saviour of yours, appearing in all his Majeſty, ſhall call you forth from the midſt of that vaſt Aſſembly of men of all Times and Places, and looking very graciouſly upon you, ſhall take particular notice of the Zeal, Love, ſincere Affection and Piety with which you have always behaved your ſelves towards him, and in his Cauſe.

O what Tongue can deſcribe the Joy you will feel in your hearts, when the Camp

Camp of Heaven, as it marches and moves on, ſhall ſhout and rejoice to meet you; when the Angels, who conceived ſo much Pleaſure at your firſt Converſion, ſhall loudly triumph at the Conſummation of your Happineſs!

O how will your Souls overflow with grateful Reflections upon the Boundleſs Goodneſs of God, when the Patriarchs, and Prophets, and Holy Apoſtles, and Glorious Martyrs, with all the People of the Lord, ſhall congratulate your eſcape from a wicked and miſerable World, and ſing, and praiſe their Redeemer, at this the accompliſhment of your Salvation!

When having put on a Splendid Body of Light, Chriſt ſhall preſent you to his Father on the Throne, and reckon up all your Prayers, and Faſtings, and Tears; all your Acts of Devotion; all your Deeds of Charity and Compaſſion to thoſe in Miſery; your readineſs on every occaſion to comfort Widows, relieve Orphans, and to deliver the humble and helpleſs from the hard hands of the Oppreſſor;

ſor; your Meekneſs, Temperance, and Chaſtity, and inceſſant Pains to reduce your lower appetites to a ready Obedience to the Divine Laws, and the ſuggeſtions of clear Reaſon; when your Kindneſs to Strangers; your Humility in a Proſperous State; your Patience and Submiſſion in Adverſity; your unſhaken Conſtancy to the Intereſts of him your dear Maſter under Perſecution; and your ſteddy adherence to the True Faith, in the Times of greateſt danger, ſhall be all diſtinctly rehearſed, and accepted, and adjudged worthy of Eternal Rewards!

O how thankful will you be to God for the day in which you did ſeriouſly begin your Repentance! how will you love the man who did miniſter the occaſion, and was the Inſtrument of your ſincere Converſion, and did firſt guide you into the right Paths of Everlaſting Happineſs!

Do Thou therefore, O Lord, reveal to us ſo much of the Beauty of Thy Perfe-

ctions, that with all our Heart, and all our Strength, we may ſeek Thee; do Thou ſo direct our Steps, that having ſought, we may find Thee; and having found Thee, may Reverence Thy Majeſty, Dread Thy Power, Obey Thy Will, Love Thy Goodneſs, Adore all Thy Attributes, and Increaſe in all Deeds of Piety, until thou ſhalt put an end to this mortal Life, and take us into a Glorious Eternity.

FINIS.